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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005993

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PREF KPAL IS IZ JO MEPP

SUBJECT: KING ABDULLAH AND FONMIN MUASHER ADDRESS TRANSFER
FEAR: JORDAN WILL NOT ACCEPT ANY REFUGEES, FROM WEST OR EAST

REF: AMMAN 5912

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

Summary

11. (U) Foreign Minister Muasher and King Abdullah made successive high profile public statements October 10-11 addressing growing fears in the Kingdom about a possible large influx of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees should military action against Iraq commence. The King's remarks were part of a longer interview -- aired by the Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), and also broadcast on Jordan Television -- in which he criticized the opposition Islamic Action Front and refuted speculation that the Hashemites have ambitions to return to the throne in Baghdad (septel). End Summary.

The FM Voices Concern With Israel's Non-Answer on Transfer

12. (U) FonMin Marwan Muasher went public October 10 with growing GOJ concerns (reftel) about the possibility that Israel could exploit U.S.-led military action against Iraq to expel large numbers of Palestinians to Jordan. In a meeting with foreign journalists, Muasher stated "we don't want to see a situation where the Israeli government might make use of a war in Iraq in order to transfer Palestinians to Jordan. While the Israelis have privately assured us this is contrary to their policies, we have not yet seen one public statement by any Israeli official stating that the transfer policy is contrary to Israeli policies. We are not reassured by that at all."

13. (U) Muasher then restated the established GOJ position that "we are not in a position to receive any large number of refugees" if war with Iraq should begin: "This will be detrimental to the interests of Jordan. This time (Note: as compared to 1990-1991. End Note.) the preparations that we have undertaken will make sure that these refugees, if we are faced with a large refugee problem, are catered to but not in a way that would also have them get inside Jordan. Jordan is in a very delicate and difficult position. We are walking an extremely tight rope. We already have a war going on in the West Bank and we don't need another war going on to our east. It is easy for outsiders to try to solve the problem from the outside. They are not living here."

The King Reinforces the Point

14. (U) On October 11, a day after Muasher's remarks, King Abdullah reinforced the GOJ's message on transfer in his MBC interview. Framing Jordan's position in terms of support for the Palestinians, the King stated "It is our duty to support their (the Palestinians') steadfastness and permanence on their lands . . . At the end, our borders will be impenetrable in the face of compulsory transfers of our Palestinian brethren or expelling them from their lands."

15. (U) Turning to Jordan's eastern borders, the King stated that "Jordan will not accept any influx of Iraqi or other refugees. We will not allow the setting up of camps for any refugee, whether of Iraqi or any other nationality, on Jordanian soil. If we here are considering the passage of refugees to their homelands through Jordan, such camps should be erected on Iraqi lands. We will not allow them to stop or remain on Jordanian soil."

Comment

16. (C) As reported reftel, the specter of large-scale refugee flows -- Iraqi, but even more so Palestinian -- into Jordan in the event of war looms large among the public's anxieties. The King's and FonMin Muasher's remarks on the subject were clearly a coordinated effort by the GOJ to address those fears. Muasher's remarks in particular betray a mounting frustration that the Israelis have not taken any action to lower the public speculation on the subject. We continue to

believe that a clear U.S. enunciation in support of Jordanian stability, and our rejection of actions that could compromise it, would be useful, making it easier for the Jordanians to overcome the political obstacles to full coordination with refugee relief organizations.

GNEHM